

# Sexual harassment in the Scandinavian hotel industry. Experiences from three hotels in Denmark, Norway and Sweden

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The main questions in this report address how workplace sexual harassment in the Scandinavian hotel industry is understood, dealt with and prevented. We focus on how employers, i.e. senior and middle management in the hotel industry, understand sexual harassment and how various cases are dealt with. We have also interviewed union representatives and safety delegates to obtain assessments from the employees' representatives as well. Our discussion of the questions is based on qualitative interviews conducted at three large hotels: one in Denmark, one in Norway and one in Sweden. We carried out 20 qualitative interviews altogether, which comprise the study's evidence base. A premise for the analysis is that the similarities between the Scandinavian countries, the hotel industry and the statutory framework in this area are greater than the differences. However, national legislation and regulations on harassment and sexual harassment form an important backdrop for our assessment of the interview data.

Anti-discrimination laws in the Scandinavian countries are based on EU directive 2006/54/EC, which defines sexual harassment as 'any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'.

The interview data show that sexual harassment in the hotel industry in general is a challenging area for the working environment field. Cases of guests perpetrating harassment are viewed as easier to deal with than cases in which co-workers or managers are the perpetrators of harassment. Managers find that such cases are difficult to assess due to a lack of clear definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment and situations that fall into a 'grey zone'. The interview data from the three hotels show that sexual harassment cases are addressed at the lowest level of management and that upper-level management is called in when necessary.

The three case hotels are part of large international hotel chains, and obtain their systems and personnel policy guidelines from their HR headquarters. Employee surveys are conducted on a regular basis under the direction of those headquarters. The companies' values form the basis of the questions

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Mona Bråten og Beate Sletvold Øistad

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in the survey, and no direct questions about harassment or sexual harassment are asked. The senior management at all three hotels emphasise the positive results of the employee surveys and believe that harassment and sexual harassment are not a significant problem at their hotels. There are few established procedures for dealing with sexual harassment between co-workers. The cases that come to light are handled individually, based on the facts of the case. Here there can be wide variation; no two cases are alike. It was emphasised in the interviews that action plans and procedures are important primarily for preventing sexual harassment. However, specific cases must be decided on an individual basis and depend on the situation. In cases involving guests, the hotels have clear guidelines and procedures for how to act. Union representatives and safety delegates have limited involvement in the sexual harassment work at the hotels in question.

The interview data have been obtained from a small number of individuals and only one hotel chain in each country, and thus do not provide a sound basis for drawing definite conclusions about handling and preventing sexual harassment. The interview data serve mainly to provide important insight into the social processes underlying sexual harassment in the hotel industry, the actions hotels take to prevent and deal with sexual harassment, and the challenges they face in this regard. A mapping study of the hotel industry in the three countries would provide a more nuanced understanding of how the companies at the local level address harassment and sexual harassment as working environment challenges, and thus form a larger basis on which to assess the significance of differences in national laws and regulations.

Given that surveys from the Scandinavian countries have shown that sexual harassment is more prevalent in the hotel industry than in many other industries, we also point out the need for a more extensive survey of employees that will highlight issues of harassment based on various forms of discrimination in this industry. A survey of this kind would also form the basis for assessing the number of unreported cases of harassment and sexual harassment in the industry among different groups of employees.